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# An introduction to the African Ajami Library

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# Introduction to the African Ajami Library

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Eleni Castro  
OpenBU & ETD Program Librarian  
Boston University Libraries

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A photograph of Prof. Fallou Ngom, a Black man with glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. He is sitting at his desk in an office, smiling at the camera. Behind him are wooden cabinets and a window. The window looks out onto a city street with a brick building labeled 'WYATT RESIDENCY' and some trees. On the windowsill, there are two mugs and a small wooden gourd. A printer is visible on the desk behind him. A semi-transparent dark red box with white text is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

Prof. Fallou Ngom  
Boston University

# African Ajami Library in OpenBU (since 2011)

[hdl.handle.net/2144/1896](http://hdl.handle.net/2144/1896)

## African Ajami Library

Browse By:

Issue Date Authors Titles Subjects

Search within this community and its collections:

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AAL is a collaborative initiative between Boston University and the West African Research Center (WARC) in part funded by the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme. The AAL Project is founded and led by Dr. Fallou Ngom (Professor of Anthropology and Director of the African Studies Center at Boston University). AAL is envisioned as a continental open access public repository of aggregated Ajami texts from Muslim Africa. The first step in building AAL took place in the summer of 2011. Professor Ngom and Mr. Roger Brisson, Head of Metadata Services of Boston University traveled to Senegal to lead a workshop at WARC focused on digitization techniques of endangered Wolof Ajami manuscripts. Five people were trained in the workshop, including Mr. Ablaye Diakite (AAL-Team Member), Mr. Birane Gassama (AAL-Team member), Mr. Abdoulaye Niang (WARC Technical Director), Mr. Aliou Badara Sarr (WARC Assistant Librarian), and Mr. Ali Diop (an independent scholar).

Although written records are rarely regarded as part of sub-Saharan Africa's intellectual heritage, important bodies of Ajami literature have existed in Oromo, Somali, Tigrigna, Kiswahili, Amharic, and Malagasy in East Africa, and Bamanakan, Mandinka, Kanuri, Yoruba, Berber, Hausa, Wolof, and Fulfulde in West Africa for centuries. In South Africa, Muslim Malay slaves produced the first written record of Afrikaans in Ajami. The neglect is due to a number of factors, including the lack of an Ajami public depository, the limited number of individuals with the linguistic skills and cultural background required to analyze Ajami documents, and a lack of recognition of the cultural value of Ajami texts, as many Europeans and Arab scholars with the linguistic competence to study these materials have often deemed them of little scholarly interest. Most assume that sources of useful knowledge on Africa are either oral or written in European languages. Yet, Ajami traditions of Africa are centuries-old and are quite varied, consisting of satirical, polemical and protest poetry, as well as biographies, eulogies, genealogies, talismanic resources, therapeutic medical manuals, family journals, business transactions, historical records, speeches, texts on administrative and diplomatic matters (correspondence between Sultans and provincial rulers), Islamic jurisprudence, behavioral codes, grammar, and even visual arts. The primary goal of AAL is to ensure that these materials are no longer treated as insignificant vestiges, but rather as major sources of local African knowledge, without which a holistic and in-depth understanding of Islamized Africa will remain elusive.

### Sub-communities within this community

[Mandinka Ajami and Arabic Manuscripts of Casamance Senegal](#) [296]

### Collections in this community

[Amharic Ajami Manuscripts of Ethiopia](#) [0]

[Dagbanli Ajami and Arabic Manuscripts of Northern Ghana](#) [21]

[Fulfulde & Kanuri Ajami Materials of Northeastern Nigeria](#) [17]

[Fuuta Jalon Pular Ajami Manuscripts](#) [25]

[Hausa Manuscripts](#) [6]

[Niger-Niamey Manuscripts of Mali](#) [0]



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DISCOVER

Author

[Unknown](#) (93)

[Ngom, Ibrahima](#) (63)

[Ajura, Afa Yusuf](#) (21)

[Castro, Eleni](#) (17)

# Manuscript Locations

- Senegal (*Wolof and Mandinka*)
- Guinea (*Pular*)
- Ghana (*Dagbanli*)
- Nigeria (*Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Nupe, Yoruba*)
- Madagascar (*Malagasy*)
- Ethiopia (*Amharic\**)

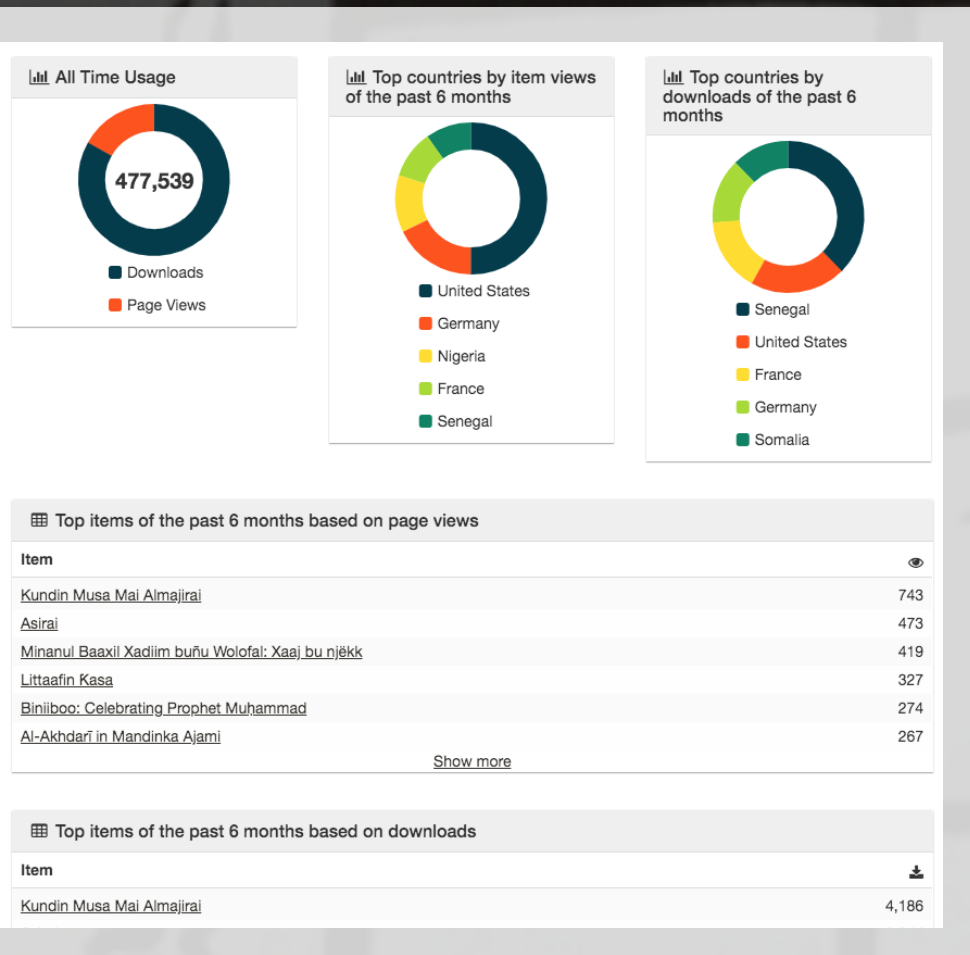
\* Coming soon

Detailed Map: [bit.ly/2nrZCjz](https://bit.ly/2nrZCjz)





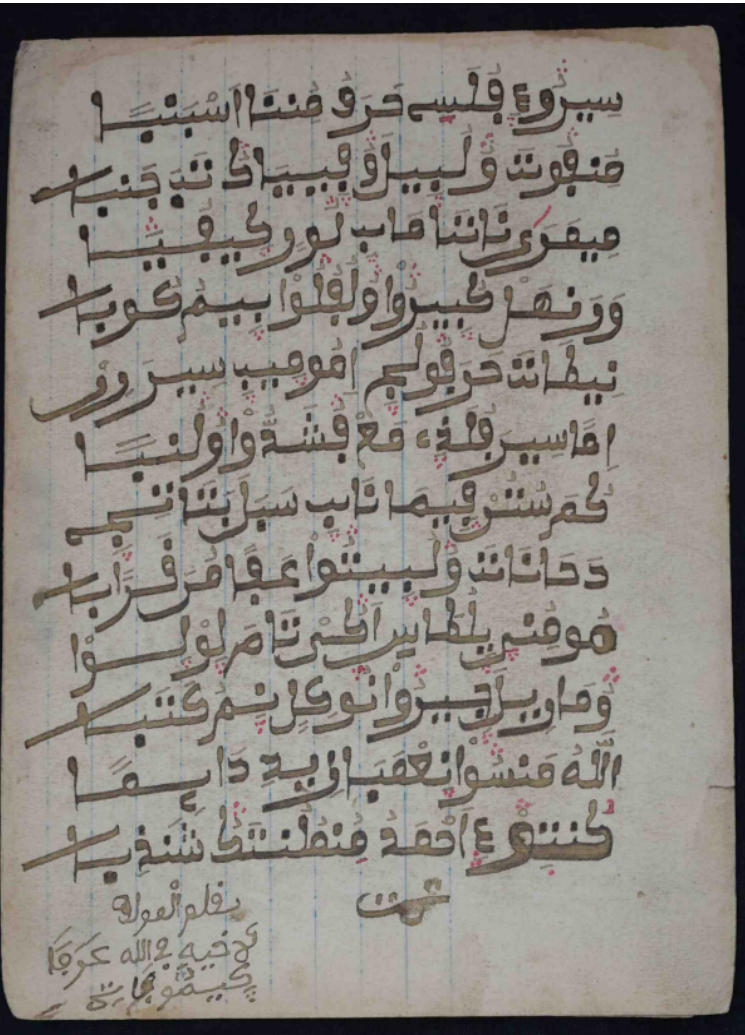
# AAL Usage





# What Kinds of Manuscripts?

## 1. Multilingual Texts



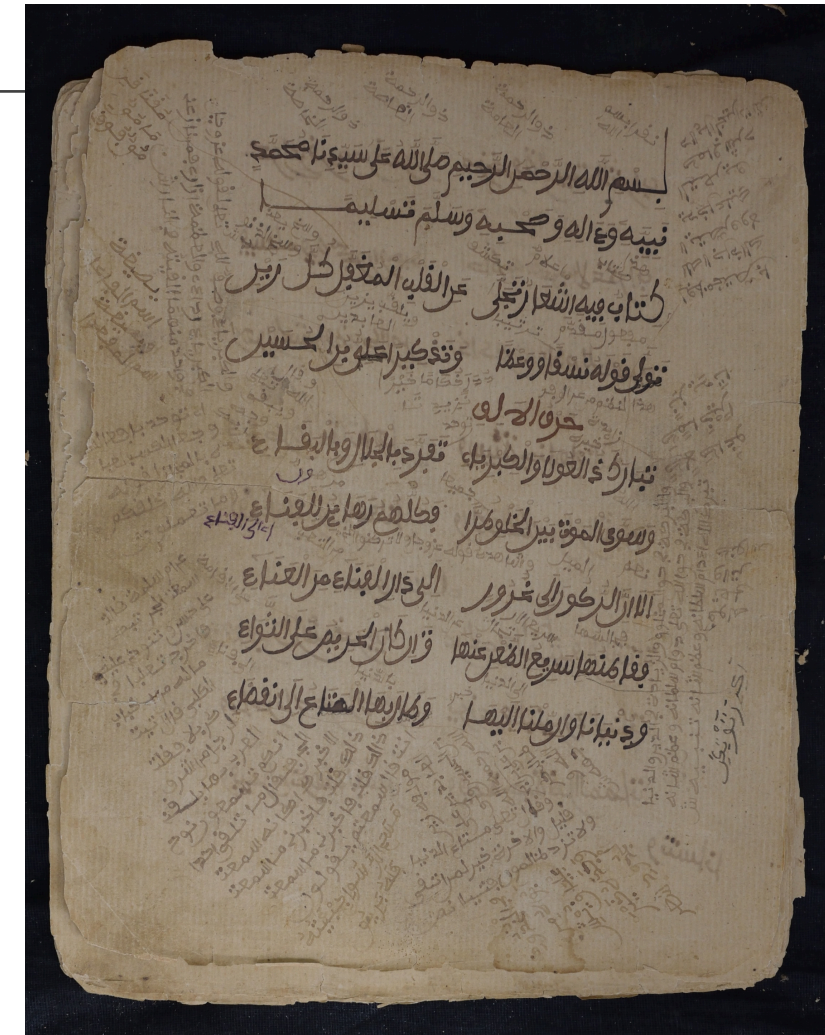
<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/37347>

## 2. Illustrations



<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/37405>

## 3. Living Documents



<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/37699>









# AAL Fieldwork Team and Partners from Senegal

**Fieldwork team:** Ablaye Diakité, Ibrahima Yaffa & Ibrahima Ngom. **Local Partners:** West African Research Center





Nigeria



Nigeria

Mustapha Kurphi



Ghana

Fuseini Abdul-Fatawu and Karl Haas



Ghana

Baba Issahak (manuscript owner) and  
Saeed Dawuni

# AAL Fieldwork Teams from Nigeria and Ghana



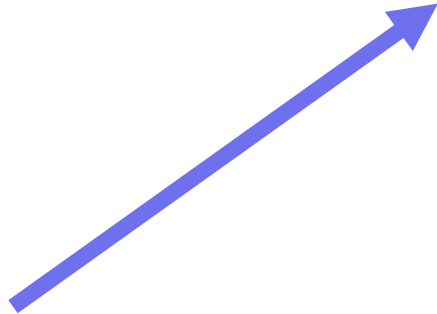
# AAL Project Workflows (High-Level)

N.B. project team works with local experts to translate into culturally appropriate context and workflow

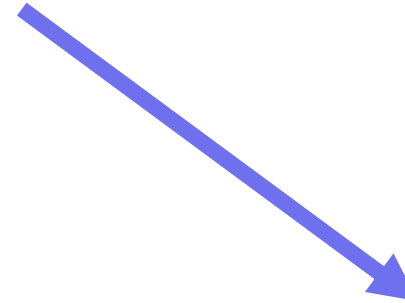
**1. Prep:  
Digitization  
Guidelines**



**2.  
Fieldwork  
Digitization**



**3. Google  
Drive  
for  
Review**



**5. Upload  
OpenBU**



**4. Post-  
processing**

See Detailed Example:  
<https://tinyurl.com/y2buevdw>

# Fieldwork Process: Digitization & Interviews



Images: Ibrahima Ngom

# Future Opportunities for African Ajami Library

- **Transcription:** Extending Unicode support
- **Annotation & Translation:**
  - NEH Collaborative Research Grant (RZ-260906-18)
  - US Dept of Ed Grant for Ajami Readers
- Continue building meaningful **partnerships + collaborations** with:
  - global scholars & researchers
  - manuscript owners, and
  - local communities

# Additional Readings and Resources

Ngom, Fallou. (2016). Muslims beyond the Arab world : The odyssey of 'Ajamī and the Murīdiyya (Religion, culture, and history series). New York: Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190279868.003.0001>

Ngom, Fallou. (2016). "Chapter 11. Murid Ajami sources of knowledge: the myth and the reality." Maja Kominko (ed.), From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2015,  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0052.11>

Fallou Ngom & Eleni Castro (2019) History Compass, "[Beyond African orality: Digital preservation of Mandinka 'Ajamī archives of Casamance'](https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12584)" <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12584>



# Thank you!



**Eleni Castro**

OpenBU & ETD Program Librarian  
Boston University Libraries

[ecastro@bu.edu](mailto:ecastro@bu.edu)

<https://open.bu.edu>